

Chain of Souls

A Review by Russ DesAulnier

Roger Taylor, the protagonist of *Chain of Souls*, is an Ian Fleming sort but with much more intelligence and depth of character. James Bond would never be found deeply mourning an old college friend. The novel starts out with Taylor, like Bond, in bed with a gorgeous princess paramour, but duty calls him off in her Majesty's service at the behest of the legendary Lord Mountbatten to quell a popular but threatening death-fast by a rumored Jesus-like young woman in the northern Indian town of Haridwar not long after partition in 1947. It doesn't take long before Taylor narrowly escapes a train bombing meant for him and then barely emerges alive from an attempted garroting by an attacker he manages to miraculously fight off and kill with a chunk of broken glass. Then later, bare fisted, he lays out two attackers armed with knives. Lots of adrenaline and suspense in this novel.

Having arrived at Haridwar, Taylor, in British custom, is dressed for dinner at a fine hotel, so often the case with Bond, only Taylor prefers gin and tonic, rather than the stirred Martinis. Rugged and tough like Bond, Taylor is however highly educated in the empiricisms of science as well as being a philosopher. Sensitive and emotional, Taylor is deeply affected by the death of his close Oxford friend who was escorted to his end by Tibetan mysticism surrounding reincarnation. Taylor is faced with questioning all his science and beliefs, whereas such circumstances wouldn't get any consideration from Fleming's super-hero. But Roger Taylor is a man of great feeling and introspection (and vivid dreams which coincide beautifully with the novel's plot).

The mission has twists and turns that find Taylor at odds with himself and his orders, but at the end his mission is accomplished despite himself. Coincidentally, he fulfills his promise to spend a chunk of his life in India where his mind becomes opened to the possibilities of mystical transcendence and reincarnation, and finally he rejects the British high society with which he has been accustomed for many years. More concretely, he rejects alcohol, having become spiritually developed, and he will go on to teach Eastern literature and mysticism at a university. He is a changed man.

Chain of Souls is an exciting read, credible, succinct, and finally satisfying, a first-class credit to the author.